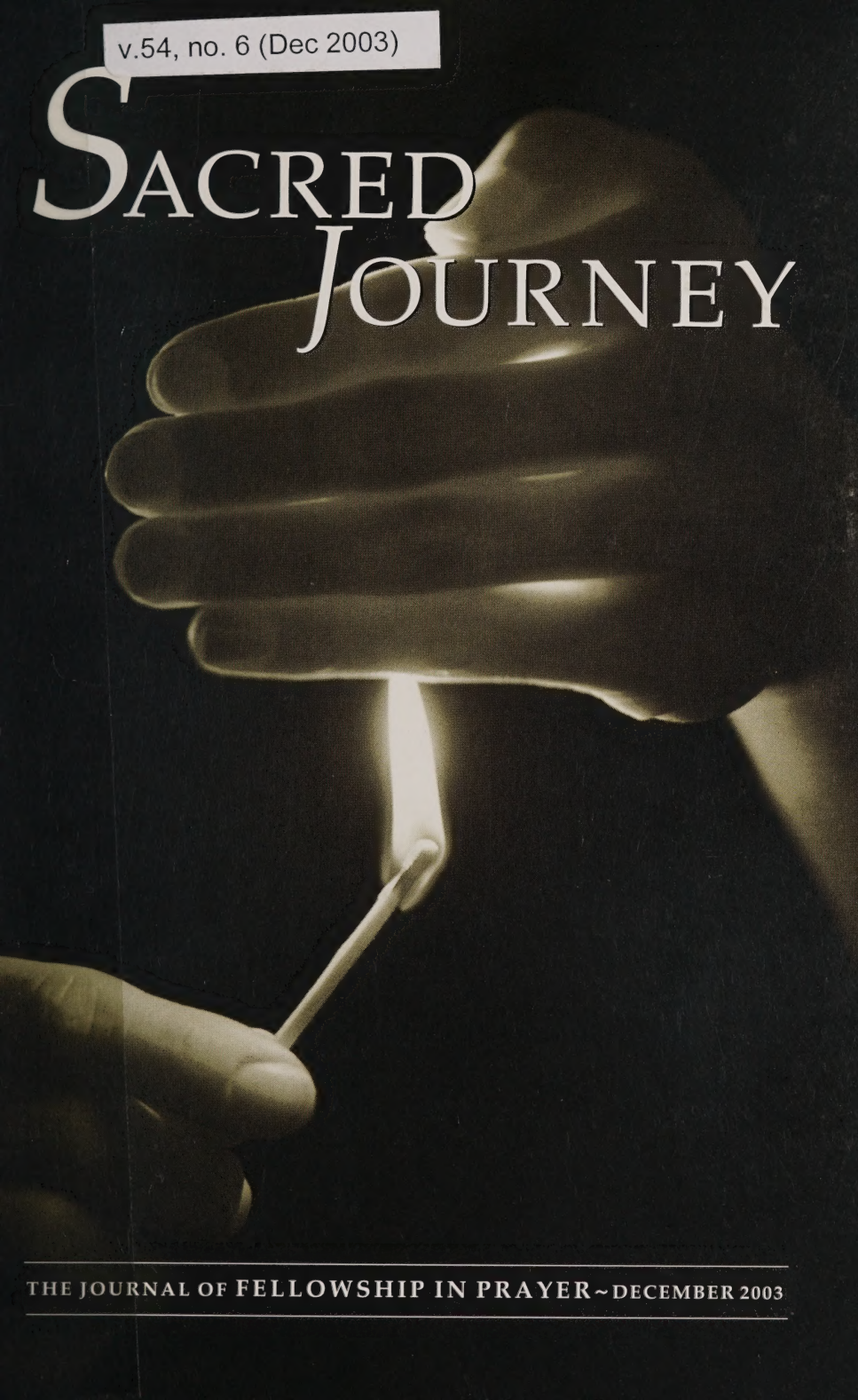


v.54, no. 6 (Dec 2003)

SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ DECEMBER 2003

SACRED JOURNEY[®]

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.



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HOWARD S. ENDE TO SUCCEED PAUL WALSH AS PRESIDENT



Fellowship in Prayer, the interfaith, not-for-profit organization incorporated in 1950, is proud to announce the election of Howard S. Ende as president of the organization following the retirement of Paul Walsh. Walsh joined the organization in 1984, became treasurer in 1985, and was named president and chief executive officer in 1986. Ende has served the organization since 1986 as a trustee, treasurer, vice president, and chair of the Executive Finance Committee.

"I am privileged and honored to be able to serve the Fellowship as president," Ende said. "Paul has been an exceptional and inspirational leader, and has significantly advanced its mission. I hope to continue the Fellowship's important interfaith work which is critical in these most difficult times."

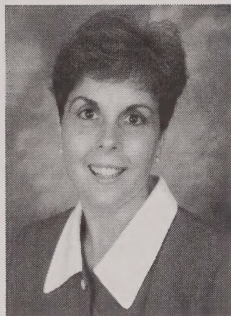
Based in Princeton for over 18 years, Fellowship in Prayer's purpose is to encourage and support a spiritual orientation to life, promote the practice of prayer, meditation and service to others, and help bring about a deeper spirit of unity among humankind. Best known for its bimonthly interfaith publication, *SACRED JOURNEY*, in recent years Fellowship in Prayer has sponsored the

successful “Companions on the Sacred Journey” interfaith conferences held in Princeton, as well as co-sponsored various other interfaith events throughout New Jersey. Presently several different faith traditions meet at Fellowship’s office at 291 Witherspoon Street for meditation or interfaith prayer groups which are open to the public.

Currently Of Counsel in the Princeton, New Jersey law office of Drinker, Biddle & Reath, Ende focuses his practice on education and corporate law. Ende served as General Counsel at Princeton University from 1990 to 2002 and had been a member of the Princeton University administration since 1974.

Ende has also served as a trustee and/or officer for a number of not-for-profit corporations and foundations including: Brookhaven National Laboratory (audit committee), Princeton Adult School (treasurer; chair, finance committee); Mpala Research Trust (chairman); Mpala Wildlife Foundation (president); Princeton-in-Africa (treasurer); Princeton Summer Theatre; US.ZA Education Initiative (in association with the University of Capetown); and the American Tort Reform Association.

THE BEST PLACE TO BE FOR THE HOLIDAYS



What are your best holiday memories? If yours are like mine, the blue-ribbon moments are simple, unexpected times when the meaning of why we celebrate rang clear.

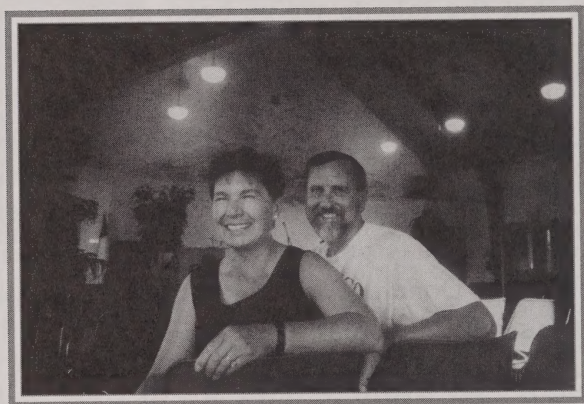
One year when my firstborn was tiny, after she had torn the shiny wrapping off of too many presents, we learned, as young parents do, that the trimmings and bows offer more joy to a toddler than carefully chosen new clothes and toys. We shared a good dinner and the excitement of the day began to shift to the blue letdown that follows great anticipation. My thoughts turned to my friend whose son was in the hospital. When the prompting persisted, I took the presents we had for my friend and her son and drove to the hospital unannounced. No one was in the hospital. The skeleton staff was longing to leave. The place was lonely, artificially lit, and sad. My friend sat with her son in her lap rocking back and forth. When she saw me, she stood, still holding her son and she began to cry. She had felt so alone on Christmas Day. The best present opened that day was the single package opened by her son. Their faces and their happiness in being with friends reminded me that the real present people want is our loving presence.

In this issue our feature interview with Cheryl and Ralph Broetje reverberates with hope. These two own an orchard in Washington State, but what they grow is more than apples. They grow dreams. Over the years they have served as a “dream team” for young people who want to make a difference in the world. Read this and hear their call: “In doing the things that matter, together, lies our peace, [and] our true security....”

Connon Barclay and Paul Auge tell two different stories from prisons that remind us that God is accessible in all circumstances. Donna Schaper provides a loving reminder that the talents we’ve been given are useless unless given away. In “The Big Bang,” our *Transforming Experience* feature, Doug Wilson learns through hardship that transformation is less about doing more and more about doing less to hear the quiet voice of love. Mary Murphy, one of *SACRED JOURNEY*’s favorite storytellers, tells a children’s Christmas pageant story full of hilarity and family love. Ida Donahay Devlin and Jim Tull separately describe the simple spiritual practices of everyday life like ironing and walking that help center them in God’s presence. As always, *Illuminations*, *Prayers*, and *Poetry* are chock full of beautiful words that point us toward what matters most in life.

In the weeks to come, may *SACRED JOURNEY* help you remember that the blue-ribbon moments in this busy season are the ones filled with loving presence. Keep it simple, keep it slower, let the love reach you and be your gift to others.

Cheryl & Ralph Broetje



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Making Dreams Come True An Interview With Cheryl & Ralph Broetje

Cheryl Broetje and her husband, Ralph, operate Broetje Orchards near Pasco, WA. They market their products under the First Fruits label. Their successful business has led to the creation of many vibrant ministries largely focused on under-served communities. Cheryl is a long-time friend of the Institute for Servant Leadership, an educational ministry providing opportunities for spiritual formation and leadership development for those who feel called to be servant leaders. She was recently interviewed for their publication Turning Point and she shares a part of her story here. The Institute's web address is www.servleader.org. This interview is reprinted with permission.

TP: Cheryl, you and your husband own and operate a large and successful orchard business. How did you get started?

Cheryl Broetje: From his youth, Ralph had a vision that he would own a farm and help kids in India. When we married, we started to pursue that dream. We had no resources, no track record, no credit, no college degrees, and no inheritance. We just had a dream. We were able to borrow enough money to put a down payment on a

cherry orchard in the spring of 1968. Then the trouble began. Two weeks after we signed the papers, the crop froze out. The next year it rained out. The third year a cherry fruit fly infestation kept us from harvesting a single cherry. Then Ralph was called into the service during the Vietnam War.

After such a disastrous beginning, how did you keep going?

That's when our "dream team" helped us. Ralph's father helped us run the farm while Ralph was away. Our banker kept extending our loan. The seller of the farm gave us more time to pay. Looking back, it is as if we had all been hand-picked by a force greater than ourselves and woven together in the service of this dream. Today, the orchard and the community which has come into being around it do help kids in India, Africa, Latin America, and here in the States.

Tell us a little about the orchard and the community.

Recently a group of Hispanic pastors from around the Northwest came to visit our farm community, Vista Hermosa, which we built on the property to provide housing for the families of many of our workers. It features about 100 three- and four-bedroom homes and 24 two-bedroom apartments in addition to an elementary school, gym, chapel, small grocery store, and a preschool. About a quarter of our work force lives there with about 250 children.

These pastors wanted to know why our Anglo family had chosen to care about people of Latino heritage. We could only answer that we had been needy! About the time we got into farming, the traditional labor force of white migrant laborers stopped coming. We were desperate for people to help harvest our crop. Quite simply,

the Hispanics had showed up!

Like my husband and me, these Latino families came with little more than a dream for a better life. Many had little or no formal education, no money, and few possessions. We spoke English and they spoke Spanish. But we all had many gifts that just needed to be evoked and recognized. That is what we have tried to do in our farm community. Amazingly, most years we are now able to export help to other communities around the world from the abundance created through this mutually loving, serving community.

Give us an example of how you “export help.”

Our farm is now about 6000 acres, mostly apples. I did not know it, but Ralph had planted about 50 acres of cherry trees. Cherries are a very difficult crop as they need just the right combination of sun and rain. One year Ralph decided to cut them down, because they had not produced any fruit for three years. But as we talked about it, we remembered the Bible story of the tree that was given one more chance to bear fruit so we left them for another year saying to ourselves that if we got a good cherry crop we would give the profits away. We got a great crop the next year and were able to send \$450,000 to an orphanage in southern Mexico we had been supporting so that they could build an additional facility. We have been giving away the profits from the cherry orchard ever since. God has done far better at profit making than we ever did!

In addition to your work on the farm, you also founded The Center for Sharing. What was the genesis of that?

I was in Mexico a number of years ago on a church mission. A friend and I were asked to feed a couple of children in one of the huts of this small poor village because the

mother had to attend to a neighbor whose child had just died. I remember going into this hut—I can see it in my mind’s eye as if it were yesterday—to find two young adults waiting for breakfast, both born with no eyes. My friend started feeding the young woman, and I, having nothing to do, put my hand on her back. She seemed to become more interested in me than eating. Then she hugged me and just leaned against me. She became the teacher for me that day in that she gave me her total presence, the only thing she had to give.

We have never forgotten what it felt like to find ourselves on the outside looking in, with nothing but a dream. With a community around us, the dream was able to be born and thrive. In turn, we feel called to help evoke the gifts of others, helping to give birth to their seemingly impossible dreams in spite of current circumstances.

What kinds of things does The Center for Sharing do?

Blaise Pascal is quoted as saying of Jesus “He came to show us our riches, not his.” The mission of Jesus was to empower others to discover their gifts, their places in the healing, wholeness and reconciliation of our broken world. Jesus seemed to delight in doing his greatest works with those who would be completely overlooked as most likely candidates through whom to change the world. That’s what The Center for Sharing focuses on.

Over the years, we have helped others birth around 25 different projects, from medical clinics for the working poor to homes for hurting teens. Currently we have a program for young adults as interns. We pay them to work as aides in schools and churches. We require that they continue their academic education as well as participate

in servant leadership development training. We try to be a dream team for them as they pursue their goals. We are high-risk investors in dreams!

We also house a servant leadership school. We offer a nine-month course in local leadership formation designed to evoke “call” in participants, to serve some specific people group. We have taught servant leadership in Mexico as well, or wherever there are those seeking greater meaning and purpose in life.

What is Jubilee Youth Ranch?

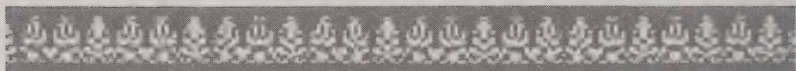
After going through a crisis with one of our children about 10 years ago, a goose-hunting ranch adjacent to the farm came up for sale. We bought it and turned it into a ranch for troubled youth, ages 13 to 18. At the moment, about 50 boys from around the U.S. are in our one-year residential program. Our dream is that they experience a jubilee in their lives, and go back to their communities as servant leaders.

What else would you like to share with our readers?

People who have been to hell and back again are the ones who are unafraid to risk their attachments to outer security for something new. In our context they are largely from non-white or immigrant communities. They can lead us by saying to the rest of us: “Don’t be afraid, gringos. We can do it!”

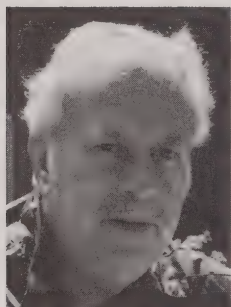
We have experienced in our own lives that life flows from Spirit, not the other way around. In doing the things that matter, together, lies our peace, our true security, and our compelling desire to connect with others in the service of a fairer world, regardless of the outcome.

SPIRITUALITY & EVERYDAY LIFE



Sam's Christmas at the County Jail

Connon Barclay



During the holiday season most of us have our favorite stories to pass on to the young and new audiences. One of my favorite memories is one not told before, and it won't make the evening news, but it's one I've never forgotten.

Working in a prison for well over a decade, I saw many prisoners who used religion as part of their personal agenda. It wasn't difficult to spot the phony convert or the manipulator who toyed with the volunteer staff's gifts of good intentions. It wasn't unusual to see prisoners kneel by their bunks when an officer made his rounds, pretending to be in meditation to increase the chances of good reports or maybe being overlooked in routine matters.

Connon Barclay is a freelance writer from Holland, Michigan and a retired correction officer. He and his wife Shirley are known as the couple who walk Betsy, a golden retriever, every morning and night. Betsy visits nursing homes and schools, and she helps Connon with his writing process.

Nevertheless, I was a witness to many a man locked away from family and friends honestly seeking communication and communion with God. These were prisoners one might observe kneeling by their bunks with hands folded in silent prayer when an officer wasn't scheduled to make rounds and when all other prisoners were sleeping. Many of these same prisoners did attempt to lead better lives even within institutional settings.

My story is not about the remarkable changes some men and women make when they sincerely turn their lives over to God when confronted with tough times. No, my story is about a regular, everyday kind of guy easily lost in a crowd. I'll call him Sam. Sam said his prayers without notice.

He served almost a year in a county jail before he completed a short sentence in a state prison. Sam wasn't different from many felons in that he never received money to make bail, so he served a long time in jail before he was sentenced.

The difference with Sam is that rare yet all-too-familiar story of a lost soul who discovers he has no real friends or even family after he is arrested. Sam thought he had dozens of friends, and he counted on a hometown group of family. Still, every Saturday when visits were announced, Sam's name was never called. He can tell of those nine months of Saturdays spent on his bunk hearing every prisoner's name called for visits at least several times per month. He never received even one visit.

Sam came to the county jail without any money, and therefore could not receive a weekly order of snacks and stamps and such. You have to laugh when Sam describes going every day from 5 PM to 6 AM without any munchies. His time was spent in twelve-man and six-man cells, and he recalls the fight he waged against the daily stress of

incarceration without support.

Sam admits he never had the courage to get on his knees and pray in front of his jail cellmates, but he did start a regular nightly ritual of silent praying. I asked him what he prayed for, and his response was interesting.

He said, "I turned my nights and days over to God and simply asked for forgiveness, for strength, and for the ability to make good Christian decisions for one more day."

I had expected to hear his prayers filled with lots of foodstuffs or clothes or new friends, because it is so easy to ask for things when you have nothing. Frankly, if you knew him today, you wouldn't doubt that Sam asked only for mercy and guidance.

He had never felt ridicule like that he received from cellmates because he had no visits. Everyone assumed he was some bad character. In reality, Sam was just the typical selfish person . . . and it caught up with him sooner than some others.

Now for the worst part of Sam's journey to repay society—he had no shoes. All the other prisoners had visitors bring them basketball or whatever soft shoes were allowed. Having no visits, Sam was forced to walk on the cement floors in his socks. One pair of socks.

Although his feet ached and his pride suffered, Sam washed his lone pair of sweat socks every night at the cell's drinking fountain. He told me his socks ended up more gray than white, but they were clean. Many days he felt anger that others had shoes. His anger was so consuming he had to start including a call for patience in his nightly prayers.

Then he told me what happened to him in the jail at Christmas time. One Saturday, long after visits were over,

an officer called him to the bars. Sam stood in shock as the officer gave him one brand new pair of socks. The only explanation Sam ever received was that the socks were left for him at the front desk.

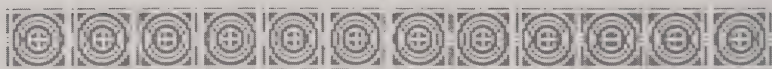
The gift was not shoes. Socks! Sam insists it was his best Christmas ever—even to this day—because he received them anonymously without any demands.

Sam eventually returned to his hometown and he lived a good and honest life with a heart filled forever with goodness.

Wouldn't it be a present of worth if someone finished with family and community needs had something left over—and they helped out any 2001 Sams? Imagine if another county-jail prisoner has turned their life over to God one day at a time just like Sam . . . and it only took a very small gift for the spirit of Christmas to work its magic again.

Whoever gave Sam the Christmas socks helped a man erase his bitterness, and the gift provided good footing for his continued faith.

I L L U M I N A T I O N S



It is not because angels are holier than men or devils that makes them angels, but because they do not expect holiness from one another, but from God alone.

~ *William Blake*

I believe we are free, within limits, and yet there is an unseen hand, a guiding angel, that somehow, like a submerged propeller, drives us on.

~ *Rabindranath Tagore*

I throw my selfe down in my chamber, and I call in and invite his angels thither, and when they are there, I neglect God and his angels, for the noise of a file, for the rattling of a coach, for the whining of a doore.

~ *John Donne*

Angels are spirits, but it is not because they are spirits that they are angels, they become angels when they are sent. For the name Angel refers to their office, not their nature. You ask the name of this nature, it is spirit; you ask its office, it is that of an Angel which is a messenger.

~ *Saint Augustine*

So great is the power of angels in the spiritual world that, if I should make known all that I have witnessed in regard to it, it would exceed belief. Any obstruction there that ought to be removed because it is contrary to Divine order the angels cast down or overthrow merely by an effort of the will and a look.

~ *Emanuel Swendenborg*

P R A Y E R S



“On Prayer”

Ed Wilder

How will I pray today?

Will I pray for things to change or will I pray in a way that helps me accept the reality of what is?

Will I pray for a miracle or will I pray in a way which stimulates my head and my heart to make something positive happen?

Will I pray asking for the answers to difficult questions or will I use the process of praying to calm me down so I can make a creative choice?

Will I pray for those I label dysfunctional and sinful or will I pray acknowledging my limitations and find a way to do the best I can with them?

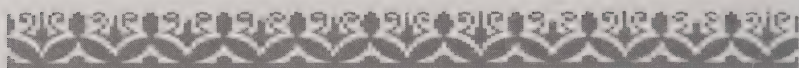
Will I pray asking for a blessing for my good deeds or will I pray looking for yet another freely given blessing I have forgotten or never noticed before?

How will I pray today?

How will you pray today?

Ed Wilder, M.Div., M.Ed., LMFT-Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Supervisor Candidate, Senior Chaplain for Home Health/Outpatient Services at Baptist Medical Center in Jacksonville, Florida, and member of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

SPIRITUALITY & SERVICE



What If I'm Talented? Is There Any Hope For Me?

Donna Schaper

*Based on Matthew 23:1-12
The Parable of the Talents*



Some of us are talented. We are people with gifts whose basic spiritual need is to be careful not to become the prisoner of our gifts. Hoarding is our sin; expelling and giving away is our victory. Jesus condemns those who hang on to what they have and praises those who invest it.

This talents story is one of the meanest of all. Outer darkness is the curse; if we don't invest ourselves in God's world, we will find ourselves in the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Ask the winner of a Pulitzer Prize if this is true or not: they will tell you the tremendous pressure on them to maintain and repeat their success. Ask my son, the star Frisbee player. When he wins, he is a saint. When he doesn't win, he is blamed. Ask a successful preacher: is he or she really free to move "down" to a smaller church? How are we going to "keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Paree"?

Donna Schaper is pastor of Coral Gables Congregational Church in Florida.

Talented people have talented, well dressed, sophisticated problems. Those who can't give away what they have are already in hell. We are constipated spiritually. We feel bloated and unable to move. We are not free. We are bound. We become so scared at losing what we have that we don't even enjoy it while we have it.

Some people hang on to their children and live in great fear of the empty nest. Other people hang on to their jobs even if they are bored stiff. Still other people keep way too much security in their personal accounts, so fearful are they of having less than they have at any given moment. Some of these people even took the rising stock market of the nineties as a sign of something permanent—and now live in a loss of what they only had momentarily. These people can't stand the word down; they only like the word up. They live by the false scale.

Another kind of person also exists. That person is not the captive of his or her talents. That person does not stand on the edge of safety but lives deeply within it.

That person is like the church in Northampton, Massachusetts that gave away its entire endowment of \$75,000 in 1969 to build a new church. It went broke on purpose. The church now has three million dollars in endowment. Why? We can have what we can let go of. The church made the right decision. It became a talented rather than a fearful church.

That person is like the widow who wrote a living will to her favorite organization and let the congregation spend from her "inheritance" while she was still alive. She watched an orphanage grow—instead of taking care of herself. Why? She had become "tired" of her savings account, as she put it.

That person is like the talented high school basketball

player who passes the ball in a game, handing an easy shot to a player who is in a slump. Or the talented dancer who teaches other kids how to dance and hopes they get as good as she is. Or the talented writer who gives out editor's names to other writers, in hopes that they too will be published. Or the parent who cheers for the first string goalie who makes a good play as well as cheering for their own son, sitting on the bench. Or the model who tells a homely girl that she looks good today.

The most talented people are those most free of their talents. They own their talents rather than their talents owning them. When we keep a little distance even from the good stuff that surrounds us, we find that we can enjoy it, use it, and secure ourselves by it. When we hang on to our wealth too tightly, we crush it.

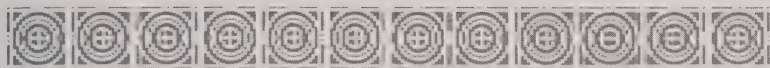
A child told her mother she was too big for training wheels. The mother said that was impossible, the child was only four. The child insisted. One day, the mother said fine, let's just see how hard you fall when I take these training wheels off your bike. The child got on the free bike and sped away into the distance. There was no fall. The mother cried and cried. To love this girl was to let her go.

Think of a fall leaf. Colorful, dry, having lived out its days well. If we hold it gently by its stem, it lives out its days, giving all those who watch it some joy. If we grab it too tightly, it will become dust and dribble in our hands.

Do you have a talent? Give it away today. Teach someone else how to make that famous casserole of yours. Or teach a child to fish, or dream, or dance, or write.

We may have what we can let go of. What we cannot let go, we cannot have.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE



Ironing Out the Wrinkles

Ida Donahay Devlin

*Retreat! Retreat! The battle can't be won.
At least not now. Pack up and back up!
Retreat!*

I need a retreat! The battle against the things of the world and not of this world is absolutely more than I can handle for one more minute! But I can't pack up and go away. Minor details of everyday life like lunch and laundry and walking the dog, and major details, such as terminal illness and family disintegration that are, thankfully, not part of everyday life, preclude going away for rest and renewal. My spirit cries out for respite. There is nowhere to go.

But there is. For me. There is a place of calm, of peace, of safety, within my reach almost anytime I need it. I have found that when times are so dark, when I need to reach up to touch bottom, if I go iron altar linens for a while, the situation always becomes more endurable. So often

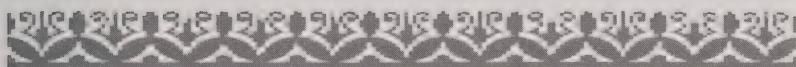
Ida Donahay Devlin lives in central New Jersey where she serves on the altar guild of her church and irons altar linens. She teaches, writes poetry and short stories, and dabbles in several art and craft forms. She has written a book of African folk tales and, as director of religious education for her church, is currently working on a summer Sunday school program for publication. Her work has also appeared in The Living Pulpit.

now, I've turned to this that I've even developed a handy guide—just run-of-the-mill tough times can be handled with three corporals, a lavabo towel and four purificators; dark times take at least five chalice veils, five corporals, seven lavabo towels and ten purificators; a crisis situation calls for a fair linen, a dozen purificators, seven corporals, a credence table cover, eight lavabo towels, a chalice veil or two, (two fair linens can be substituted for three towels and two corporals), and so on.

Seriously though—for me, the spiritual space which is created by the act of ironing the linens frees my mind, heart, and soul to expand and drink in a bright and glorious open nothingness. I see no visions, I hear no voices, I don't pray in the conventional sense of that word. It's as though the warmth of the iron and the physical action of pressing and squeezing the cloth that has been used in the sacred rituals release a residual holiness which then surrounds and holds, renews and heals me within its space. This is my rest and retreat when there is no retreat, no rest, no place to go, nowhere to hide.



A T R A N S F O R M I N G E X P E R I E N C E



The Big Bang

Doug Wilson

The emotional explosion—a marriage crisis—happened in the fall. This crisis pushed all the right buttons and soon old childhood wounds rose to the surface. All of the coping devices I had so painstakingly assembled over the past forty years were useless. Unruly feelings that had been kept locked away rose up and threatened to run wild. It was as if I was on a runaway stage coach, the horses were running free, and the reins were not in my hands.

This was my dark night of the soul. Soon after this, a tornado ripped through a community near where I live. Driving through the destruction I thought, “This is exactly how my life feels right now. Everything has been ripped up, and torn down, and I am not sure if it can be put back together again.” My inner life had taken a turn down a debris-strewn road I had never before traveled.

Pain is a great motivator and suffering can be a great teacher, but I wasn’t glad to see either of them. I received lots of well-intentioned advice. Most of it revolved around

Doug Wilson is a forty-seven-year-old high school math teacher in Bismarck, Arkansas. A father of two grown children, Doug enjoys the outdoors, hiking, canoeing, and camping.

the idea of getting busy. Do this, do that, but for God's sake, do something. Granted, my well-meaning advisors weren't telling me to pop a pill, nor take a drink of alcohol, but the idea was the same: Get busy, and stop the pain.

Thankfully, I had a counselor with a different idea. "Why don't you try spending some time alone?" he said. I was willing to try anything, so I began driving out to Lake DeGray and just sitting in my truck. Once I drove to Caddo Bend in pouring rain. As the rain ran off my truck and the pain ran off my shoulders, I recall thinking, "What in the world are you doing?" But I kept going back. And slowly, I began to have insights into the real source of my pain. I began to live through the pain that had been pushed down for so many years. I began to see the value of spending time alone in solitude. God bless the Catholics for holding onto contemplative practices that I sorely needed.

I suffered from deep feelings of shame. My wounds kept telling me: "Doug Wilson, who you are is not enough." It was not an intellectual thing. In my mind, I could reason logically that I was okay. I found through introspection that my soul had other beliefs.

Solitude helped me to get in touch with my heart. My heart did not lie to me. Sometimes it was difficult to tell my heart from my wounded self. But when I got in touch with my heart, I found feelings of shame had been "tattooed" onto my soul. I felt I was defective.

We live in a society that lives and breathes shame. We are constantly bombarded with the message that who we are is not good enough. It goes like this: We don't have the right body. Our hair color is all wrong, or worse yet, we don't have any hair. We don't drive the right car. We don't wear the right clothes. We don't have the right



Skjold Photographs

grades, nor the right degree. We don't have the right job. We don't make the right decisions. Even the people who love us may use shame to try to control us. Shame takes away personal freedom. I felt I could never be who I really am because deep down inside there was the fear that who I am could never be enough. This insidious shame constricts your life until you wake up one day and realize you're not really living. You're only surviving. You're like a caged bird with a broken wing who is unable to fly.

Now that I had discovered that my life had become my worst nightmare, what was I going to do? I decided I would choose to follow my heart. No pills, no alcohol, no getting busy. Thank God, I had friends and family members who loved and supported me. But in the final analysis, my road to healing would have to lead through my heart. I could rely on others who had traveled this road before me to offer guidance along the way, people like Scott Peck, John Powell, Joyce Rupp, and Henri Nouwen. There was one excerpt from Henri Nouwen's book, *The Inner Voice of Love*, that I went back to time and time again.

Do you really want to be converted? Are you willing to be transformed? Or do you keep clutching your old ways of life with one hand while with the other you beg people to help you change? Conversion is certainly not something you can bring about yourself. It is not a question of willpower. You have to trust the inner voice that shows you the way. You know that inner voice. You turn to it often. But after you have heard with clarity what you are asked to do, you start raising questions, fabricating objections, and seeking

everyone else's opinion. Thus you become entangled in countless often contradictory thoughts, feelings, and ideas and lose touch with the God in you. And you end up dependent on all the people you have gathered around you. Only by attending constantly to the inner voice can you be converted to a new life of freedom and joy.

Hearing the Inner Voice of Love is difficult. Other competing voices speak very loudly: "Get busy! Plug the hole in your soul with someone or something, anything, but plug it NOW!" But in the midst of all of this I found the Inner Voice was always there, calling me to let go, calling me home—home where I know I am God's beloved son. For the past six years this Voice has been gently leading me, mostly down a road of healing and discovering who I really am. This has involved a lot of time in solitude. If I were to tell most people how much time I have spent alone over the past six years, they would probably ask in puzzlement, "You spent how much time alone?" It doesn't make sense to them. But the nature of mystery runs contrary to conventional wisdom which says: Go look for another mate. Take up new hobbies. Move to another town. Start another career. Engage in distracting entertainment. Why wouldn't I "get on with my life?" Why wouldn't I do something, anything?

*I was still
empty-handed
but my heart
was full.*

I could only answer with another question: Why does a salmon swim upstream? Because something in the very core of its being is drawing it to do this. The salmon knows intuitively that this is what it must do. It's not going to be

easy and it may seem as if this hard swim leads nowhere, but the salmon simply must make the journey.

My journey called me to live in a new way. I needed to move from the highly valued doing mode and move toward simply being alive. I spent countless hours wandering along creeks and through the Ouachita Mountains searching for something. I returned each time empty-handed, but I always brought back something invisible yet life-giving. It wasn't long before I began to "hear" the Inner Voice of Love out in the woods. The birds were singing my name. The flowers were lifting their heads and saying, "We love you." The wind in the tops of the trees was whispering, "I am with you." The babbling waters of the creeks became a salve for my soul. The mountains promised to give me their peace. And each leaf that showed its fall glory had my name on it. It was as if all of creation was sending God's eternal message to me, "I love you, Doug, just the way you are on this day."

I was still empty-handed but my heart was full. I was coming back with love and grace, the only things that can mend a broken heart and heal the wounds of shame. As my wounds began to heal, my life began to expand. I cried less and risked more.

The more I come to trust the truth in my heart, that I am God's beloved son, the more my life continues to expand, internally and externally. This morning as I watched the fog rising through the trees in the woods behind my house, something began to rise inside me as well. This is my story. Perhaps you can begin to find your story in my story. Thomas Merton once compared the spiritual life to the search for a path in a field of untrodden snow: "Walk across the snow and there is your path."

SPIRITUALITY & THE FAMILY



Angels—No Wings, Please!

Mary Murphy

When I was ten and in fifth grade at St. Vincent's Elementary School, I got chosen to be the lead angel in the school's Nativity play. I was the only angel that got to say anything—I announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds. They'd all seen the star, of course, but they didn't know what the heck it was, and in general they were sore afraid.



My mother sewed a beautiful floor-length white robe. It had wide sleeves for tucking hands into. No wings (the principal had put her foot down), but my costume was covered with as many sequins as Mom had time to sew on.

Janet Beecher's mother was in charge of making the halos for all seven angels. She came to school one noon hour and measured everyone's head.

The play was scheduled for the Friday evening before Christmas. At six-thirty the cast assembled in our classroom to get into costume and makeup.

Mary Murphy, an occasional writer for SACRED JOURNEY, is a storyteller from Albany, New York. Reprinted with permission. Copyright 1996 Mary Murphy. Email: hello@albany.net.

Excitement was running high in the cloakroom, which had been turned into the girls' dressing room for the occasion. The boys kept sneaking to the cloakroom door to catch a glimpse of us girls getting dressed. However, Sister Francis, our homeroom teacher, had stationed herself on the inside of the door. She'd wait until one of the boys got so close she could hear him breathing. Then she'd push the swinging door, bopping him on the head. The resulting "ouches" were hilarious. Even Sister Francis seemed to be enjoying herself.

The role of the Blessed Virgin Mary was played by Mary Alice Tyman. She got the part because she was the only one of us with an authentic baby brother whose mother could be talked into letting him play the baby Jesus. Sister Francis thought the baby would be calmer with his own sister than with anybody else. Mary Alice had a long blue veil that covered her head and made her look like the statue of Mary in the left corner of our classroom.

Mrs. Beecher helped us angels into our flowing robes. When we were dressed, she handed out halos. The halos were made of that silver tinsel stuff that you hang on Christmas trees. The fat sparkly ribbons were sewn on white pipe cleaners which were bent into circles according to head size. I don't know what went wrong with the measuring, but my halo was too big. It sagged onto my ears and looked more like a holy headband.

The angels weren't needed at the beginning of the play, so we got to sit out front and watch until shortly after Kathy Pelletier, as the innkeeper's wife, said, "There is no, uhm, room for you here at my inn. But, like, I do have an old stable out back. You may sleep in there."

With the birth of the child imminent, the heavenly host crept backstage. In the dim light, as the others adjusted



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their robes, I checked to make sure the writing on my hand hadn't smudged. My speech to the shepherds was taken from St. Luke's account of the Nativity. It was important to say the words exactly as they were written. So just to be safe, I had my friend Robin Franey write the whole thing in ink across both my palms. If I forgot anything, I'd simply strike a prayerful attitude and read whatever words I couldn't remember.

The palm reading idea turned out to have a flaw in it because just before we were going to go out on stage, Sister Francis took my glasses off. She said angels don't wear glasses. Apparently in heaven everyone's blessed with 20/20 vision.

After the innkeeper's scene, the curtain closed, the lights went out, the cardboard sheep were pushed on and—Lo! Some shepherds were suddenly abiding in the fields. Tom Parfit, Randy McDonald, and my twin brother Michael were curled up asleep in front of the curtain when the stage lights blazed once more.

The six nonspeaking angels wafted out to stand in a tight little semicircle upstage: it was time for my entrance. The world had become a blur. The stage lights formed a gigantic star of Bethlehem. I had no depth perception so I banged into a couple of the other angels as I lurched in front of them. I was extra nervous because I could feel my halo slipping. The shepherds had become a brown glob on my right, but I turned in their direction and began: "Fear not! For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the City of David, a Savior which will . . ." At this point my halo fell off and rolled toward the footlights. I froze. I couldn't remember my name, let alone an angelic pronouncement. I had no idea what to do, and apparently neither did anyone else. I think the shepherds went back to sleep.

Finally, after a silence that gave a glimpse of what eternity might be like, my brother Michael came to my rescue. In his brown and gray shepherd's bathrobe he stood up, yawned hugely, and stretched as though he'd just woken up in his own bed. The rest of the cast watched him, transfixed like frightened deer caught in a headlight. Michael looked around and made a big show of seeing something by the footlights. He picked up the halo in one hand, a cardboard sheep in the other, and brought them over to where I was standing. "Did this fall off your head?" He held up the halo in two fingers as though he thought it might be radioactive or it might have rolled in something left by the sheep. I said, "Uh . . ." "Well, one of my sheep almost stepped on it." We could hear what sounded like choking coming from several places in the auditorium. The indignant shepherd continued, "He thought it was okay to eat, and now he's dead!" He held the crayon-

drawn carcass out to me as Sister Francis hissed “Mr. Murphy!” from the wings.

I finally found my voice. “Thank you . . . uh, Mr. . . . uh . . .” Then I snatched the halo and jammed it back on my head. Some of the tinsel had pulled away from the pipe cleaners and hung down my back like the tail of Davy Crockett’s coonskin cap.

My brother went back to his surviving sheep, and I cupped my hands three inches from my eyes and read, “For, unto you is born this day a Savior which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you. Ye shall find the babe wrapped in saddling clothes and lying in a manger.” (Boy! That didn’t sound right!)

Anyway, the eighth grader at the piano heard something like her cue and started to play “Gloria in Excelsis Deo.” We all sang as the curtain opened to reveal the final tableau: Joseph and Mary kneeling and baby Jesus lying in the “manger” surrounded by hay.

The Christmas sing-along went off without a hitch, except that during “Silent Night” we all heard a “kersplat,” whereupon the Blessed Virgin exclaimed, “Yuck!” She picked up the newborn, who was crying, and handed him to Joseph, who was pictured holding the baby in one hand and his nose in the other in a polaroid snapshot taken by Sister Francis immediately after the curtain had come down.

In the car going home, I thanked my brother Michael for helping me out on stage. His answer was somewhat lacking in grace: “I thought the play was boring enough already,” he said. I asked my mother if she noticed that I forgot my lines after my halo fell off. “No,” she said, “I thought you were just heavenly.” I think she meant it.

P O E T R Y



Song

Anne Day

I just know that I love You
oh Root, oh Beginning, oh Word

And I know that I trust You
Truth, you're the Song that I've heard

Gratitude is knowing You are here
Deep, deep within my soul

I know that when stillness surrounds me
then the I Am in me is whole.

Anne Day is a speech therapist and substitute elementary and junior high school teacher in Rochester, New York. As a pastoral volunteer she visits and prays with residents of Kirkhaven, a local nursing home. She is a member of Spiritus Christi and also enjoys singing with Schola Feminarum, a women's chant group.

Rehel Goldberg Bader is a teacher of kabbalah through Hadassah. She also studies dreams and writes. Her poem, "Prayer," received first honorable mention in the religious category in the 2002 Mississippi Valley Poetry Contest.

Robert F. Thimmesh currently works in a real estate office helping with leasing, maintenance, and other duties. He continues to be a life-long resident of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area.

Prayer

Rehel Goldberg Bader

to place the call
i searched for words
in newspapers, thesaurus,
the dictionary,
all inadequate and futile

instead,
i lit an incense candle
and watched as the
words I could not find
curled over, and
browned down
into gray smoke
a signal
like the heart of
a drum beating

and You,
just as You are,
burdened by unfinished promises,
delayed by an other world tryst
heard
and hovered
above the fire
like the passion
of faith
and remembered

Different Measures

Robert F. Thimmesh

How shall I forgive the one
who had done no wrong
(by his own measure)
when my hurt
is measured clear?

We have different
measures
for the same length—
one long, the other short.

He asks no forgiveness,
offers no remorse. His story
of the deed is true,
his tongue still shackled.

But his measure
is not mine
and the pain continues
unsalved
by his innocence.

I must find a way
to forgive the one
who measures long
as I measure short,
and find a new salve
for my measure of length.

WAYS OF PRAYER



In Loving Memory . . .

Paul Auge

This letter was written by Paul Auge, a practicing Buddhist and a prisoner at the New Jersey State Prison, to Virginia B. Phelan, Ph.D., who directs the Arts and Letters Program at Drew University, and who has worked with Paul in a group at the prison for the past eight years. Virginia sent it to us at Fellowship in Prayer, saying, "I'm sending a copy of a piece he [Paul] wrote for me . . . in the hope that it might . . . perhaps be suitable . . . for your helpful and consoling publication, which prisoners can access . . . it illustrates that even those society deems not only useless but harmful can serve others and do good. Indeed they can, for there is truly good in them, despite their having done bad things. Paul has found a way to 'bear one another's burdens' and contribute to God's work. So making Donna's prayer his own has helped him—and others."

Dearest Friend,

I bow to the Generous Teacher. In your teachings and in your private counsel, you advocate that a journal kept is a record of a search that records, traces, and chronicles the feelings of our lives and allows us to reflect on our emotions and develop ideas designed to enhance a growing awareness of God, self, and society.

Paul Auge is a practicing Buddhist and a prisoner at the New Jersey State Prison.

I keep a journal of my meditations, yet I will tell you a story that has never been written down before this moment. I send you this story and a holy card as a gift.

This story began early in 1996, in a prison library full of generously donated books. I was looking for something to read and a book on ancient Greek tragedies caught my eye. Since I have a particular fondness for ancient Greek and Roman writings, I picked up the book and out fell a Christian holy card that said, "In Loving Memory of Donna McKuhan who died on June 1, 1994." As I read the back of the holy card, I was touched by the hope and love that I felt as I read the prayer.

As a Buddhist, I do not hold the same beliefs as Donna—in an eternal heaven and the last days—but I understood that Donna believed in these doctrines and I felt a desire to help Donna achieve her perceived state of Heaven, so I undertook the duty to say her Resurrection Prayer each and every day.

Little did I know that Donna was to become, as a spiritual force on my imagination, a teacher, a friend, and a companion through many of the trials of my life. The first thing that Donna taught me was that a duty is not performed sincerely unless it is performed mindfully. In the beginning I just read the prayer quickly, without actually thinking about what I was saying or how I was saying it. Duty performed. As time went by and the prayer became embedded in my mind through sustained effort and habit, I began to feel the prayer as Donna's hope for salvation and a thankfulness for God's mercies that she had experienced during her lifetime. She invites me to share in the joy that she felt in the good things that God had given her. I feel joy. Thank you Donna, for this gift.

The prayer then becomes a petition from others, that



In Loving Memory of
DONNA MCKUHAN
JUNE 1, 1994

RESURRECTION PRAYER

Most merciful Father, we commend our departed into your hands. We are filled with the sure hope that our departed will rise again on the Last Day with all who have died in Christ. We thank you for all the good things you have given during our departed's earthly life.

O Father, in your great mercy, accept our prayer that the Gates of Paradise may be opened for your servant. In our turn, may we too be comforted by the words of faith until we greet Christ in glory and are united with you and our departed.

Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

they too may share in these same mercies from God. I, too, share in this hope. My curiosity caused me to wonder if Donna had experienced these mercies as an intellectual idea of God, or whether she experienced this grace as a living force, operating in the NOW, as her experience of a living, present God. Never having known this woman, I could create out of my imagination a person with a full and rich spiritual life that I could explore and understand, and as such, she became the mirror in which were reflected my own desires and struggle for awareness and the field in which these struggles were played out. As a tool for self awareness, I would "run it by her," and in doing so, the obstacles to my own self awareness were revealed, and this allowed me to perfect an antidote to these hindrances to my meditation practice.

In the past seven years, Donna has taken on many forms and roles. Sometimes she teaches and at other times she is the student, subject to my stumbling attempt to define and explain my progress, but at all times she is my partner in my search for the true self.

Of course I realize that the Donna I created is an illusion that I use as a tool of objectivity in my practice and I pray that the real Donna has achieved the union with God that she so desired and I thank her for loaning me her image to seek my own enlightenment.

I do not mean for this short story to reflect the depth of this particular spiritual awareness exercise, or to illustrate the use of Imaginative Imaging in the meditative/reflective practice, rather I would hope to honor Donna's life energy that must be shared in a true experience of God and Self.

Let us say Donna's prayer mindfully each day, and let us share Donna's joy in the living God, together.

Paul

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY



Secret Lessons of Francis of Assisi

Jim Tull

Around the age of eighteen, I found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus, but soon after, I was awakened even more intensely by the discipleship of Francis of Assisi. The life and legend of Francis spoke to a desire for simplicity in a world of addictive consumerism, nonviolence in a time of unprecedented killing, courageous resistance in the face of blind conformity, and a direct sort of spirituality in place of shallow and compartmentalized rituals.



Though my Franciscan inspiration has sustained itself over the three intervening decades, I have recently experienced renewed appreciation through my exposure to five of his lessons that failed to reach me in my youth, in spite of my adoration. Perhaps these are lessons he shared very clearly in his life and words, and I'm sure I nodded faithfully to them, but evidently I was not pre-

Jim Tull teaches at Providence College and the Community College of Rhode Island and conducts workshops on service, community, and social change. For many years he co-directed Amos House, a Catholic Worker-inspired house of hospitality for the poor in Providence. He can be reached at jtull@ccri.edu.

pared to receive them until other influences opened my mind and arms to them years later.

Lesson number one:

We are part of the earth and its community of life. Francis linked the meaning of his own life with the natural world and its beautiful, abundant, and diverse community of life. He interpreted Christ's message as earth-centered and conditioned his personal fulfillment on his ability to immerse himself in this community, while most people fancied themselves somehow apart from and above other life forms. At twenty, I regarded Francis' tree hugging as quaint and noble, but found the popular culture's emphasis on this devotion a bit annoying. Now I understand the paradigm shift he must have experienced. Our use of the word 'nature' is but one reflection of our collective misunderstanding that we are something else. With this mindset, we have waged war against other life as if the earth were ours alone.

Lesson number two:

Forming an egalitarian community was a dramatic departure from the highly stratified, commercialized, and oppressive social and economic order Francis and his followers had known before. Subsequent to his defection from Assisi and the prevailing social order, Francis found a second source of meaning beyond his new discipleship and fresh sense of belonging to the earth's community of life. His followers formed a community of people who supported one another on all levels. Thinking only in terms of how Francis and Clare lived so differently from those they left behind, I never considered their many Assisian followers as anything more than followers, inspired as I had been inspired.

Lesson number three:

Francis' repudiation of books (other than the Scriptures) I completely dismissed as rash and unappreciative of the different ways people learn and explore. Books have always figured prominently in my learning and personal growth process. Lately, though, I'm beginning to see what might have been the source of his stubbornness. Today, we place an unquestioning premium on literacy and perceive it as a vehicle for social mobility, but fail to recognize that the written word has always been both a source and a product of social inequality. Secondly, while all cultural symbols serve to mediate our experience of reality, literacy created a whole new order of mediation. For the blessings of literacy we have traded a manner of living and experiencing reality that is more direct and immediate. This tradeoff has hardened some of our sensory and extrasensory capacities, leaving us partially numb to the world around us.

Lesson number four:

In departing from Assisi the way he did, Francis was also defecting from society and its culture. This is a very different way of looking at this momentous transition than how I perceived it initially. I didn't see culture. I didn't see that in abandoning the conventional life of Assisi he was also abandoning civilization itself, or at least the culture of his civilization. He brought his Bible, yes, and he held on to the Church (what if the Pope had later denied him?), but left his sword, his money, as well as the prevailing models of individualism, competition, acquisitiveness, domination, social stratification, and redemptive violence. He walked away culturally as well as physically (though not completely in either respect) and tried to live a different way altogether. If there was any doubt that his intention was cultural defection and not simply running away from home, surely

this matter was clarified when Francis spoiled the sacred taboo—the culturally universal taboo—against public nudity and dropped his clothing off before heading out.

Lesson number five:

Years ago I largely ignored the manner in which Francis framed his conversion. What was at the bottom of his departure? He was inspired by a new understanding of Christ and his message, a message that spoke fundamentally to his simple desire for human happiness and a kind of freedom that confers this happiness. I had a different notion of what saintliness was about and it had more to do with self-sacrifice and altruism. At most, personal happiness was a byproduct of a more other-regarding mission. By my way of thinking, saving the world was a matter of getting people to be more saintly, like Francis, to rise above their self-interest, and to care about suffering and degradation here and afar and to act on this passion. I still encourage this kind of consciousness raising, but I also understand that if ordinary people could have access to the sources of what will make them genuinely free, happy, and fulfilled, we would all get to the Promised Land a lot more quickly, and arrive there together. There are a few standing in line for sainthood; everybody's in line to enjoy life.

Having missed these important lessons, I sometimes wonder what I did learn from my early exposure to Francis. At the same time, my current interpretations of these lessons and how I associate them with Francis are no doubt shaped by other influences as much as by the facts of the man's life. Learning these lessons over the past few years has affected how I perceive and relate to the natural world, of which I see more clearly that I am a part. One small expression of this shift is that I have moved my morning prayer and

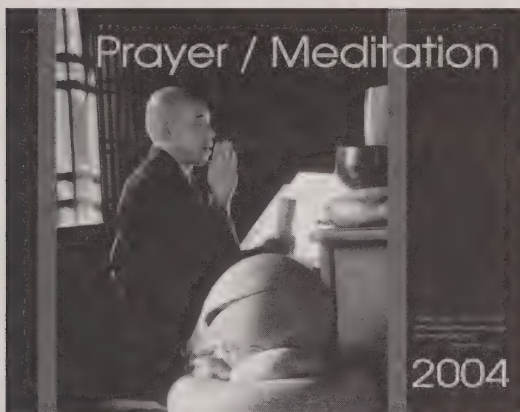
meditation practice from sitting inside to walking through a nearby city park. I have applied the lesson of community by emphasizing, in my teaching and workshop facilitation, the need to regenerate community bonds. I've also become acquainted with nearly all thirty-eight families living on my block in Providence. Nearly every block household participated in a recently completed 'consultation exchange' directory that provides a way for neighbors to lend each other their expertise and help solve problems.

I have come a long way in shedding both my prejudice against wisdom and intelligence that isn't tied to formal schooling and book learning, and (with a degree of irony) my obsession with saintliness. For years I wanted to be like Francis and tried hard to live out this calling. Voluntary poverty, celibacy, homeless shelter and soup kitchen life were my devotions. I'm trying much harder now to appreciate the humble calling to be happy and, well, ordinary, to share with everyone else this simple desire without having to rise above, spiritually and morally. As extraordinary as Francis was, his genuine identification with the guy in the crowd is the gift I am left holding.

Most dramatically, though, my reacquaintance with Francis has compelled me to believe that these 'new' lessons speak forcefully to the current human predicament and not just to my spiritual journey as an individual seeker. The world's civilized human population continues to surge toward its own extinction at a frightening pace as it depletes available resources and despoils its natural habitat. At the same exponential rate we continue to tear the remnant bonds of community life, creating a world of isolated individuals struggling to compete for survival, recognition, and fortune in an anonymous global marketplace. Francis' choice to defect has become a live option for me, but not for me as an

individual, rather for me with others, hundreds and thousands and millions of others. I have lost faith in efforts to address social problems with the tools provided within the social systems that currently support us. Our civilization, driven by an inherently dysfunctional culture, is a sinking Titanic. Yet it is merely a more evolved version of the same civilization and culture that Francis chose to abandon eight hundred years ago. My recent vocational direction has centered on promoting a dialogue around this question: What would it mean for us to make a fresh start, together?

Ordinary people, with ordinary wants and dreams, can and will respond to the suggestion that our joy and delight in life are tied up with our connection to the earth and to each other, in small circles of equals, offering our special gifts and receiving unconditional support. In my dialogue facilitation work I am consistently discovering a very wide receptivity to what is the most radical proposal I have ever seriously entertained: starting over fresh instead of continuing to tinker with the system. Affluent and poor, liberal and conservative, people engage in the dialogue as an uplifting departure from the usual remedies that keep us plodding along. It will become apparent, I believe, to more and more of us that living free and satisfying lives together will mean walking away, somewhat like Francis did, from the dominant systems we so depend on now and experimenting in new directions. Our collective survival, not just personal holiness, is on the line.



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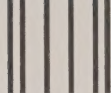
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